

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom invite you to a briefing by

Alexander Verkhovsky

Director, SOVA Information and Analysis Center (Moscow)

Defining Religious Extremism in Russia

Tuesday, May 17, 2005

9:00AM-10:30AM

in Conference Room A (4th Floor)

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

1201 Connecticut Ave NW

[entrance on Rhode Island Ave NW, next to St. Matthew's Cathedral]

"Religious extremism" is understood in at least two ways in Russia. The first, associated with so-called "totalitarian sects," results in danger for individual religious practices. The second is related to claims that religion is used as the basis for political extremism. These two views of "religious extremism" are vaguely defined in Russian law. The Russian public is very frightened of religious extremism. As a result, there have been unjustified legal sanctions against various religious groups, such as the 2004 ban on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow or the court ban on a book, written in the 18th century, by the founder of the Wahhabi sect. Alexander Verkhovsky, a long-time researcher of extremism in Russia, will review these interpretations and describe how they constitute, in his view, a danger to religious liberty in Russia.

Alexander Verkhovsky is the director of the SOVA Information and Analysis Center (<http://sova-center.ru>). Verkhovsky has been researching political extremism, nationalism and xenophobia in contemporary Russia since 1994, and has headed up several research and monitoring projects in the field, including projects on Russian ultranationalism (since 1996), on hate speech in the Russian mass-media (since 2001) and on Russian Orthodox nationalism and fundamentalism (2001-2003).

Please RSVP by May 16 by email to <dc-response@rferl.org>, by telephone to Melody Jones at (202) 457-6949, or by fax to (202) 457-6992.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

- Preeta D. Bansal ,
- Felice D. Gaer ,